

Ellen G. White and the Chicago Mission

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Without historical perspective, Ellen G. White's comments on inner-city involvement may appear ambiguous. In 1885 she wrote at length on "The Support of City Missions," which were then evangelistic centers of literature distribution, Bible reading courses, and public meetings, and which were scattered in various major cities of the United States.¹ Her article censured those who neglected this work. In 1910, after city missions had evolved into a medical missionary enterprise, usually accompanied by a restaurant and a dispensary, she complained that Adventist city missions had declined. Missions, she said, were to flourish in New York, San Francisco, Chicago, San Diego, and other urban centers.²

In 1904, however, in an article entitled "The Foundation of Our Faith," Mrs. White warned against a "false reformation" that threatened Seventh-day Adventists. If the reformation were realized, it would consist of adopting a "system of intellectual philosophy," and "the founders of this system would *go into the cities*, and do a wonderful work." A perusal of the entire article places us in a historical setting: the discussion concerns John Harvey Kellogg, who had troubled Mrs. White with the heterodox "intellectual philosophy" of his *Living Temple* and his intemperate involvement in the "wonderful work" of the Chicago Medical Mission.³ To Kellogg himself Mrs. White wrote that too much of the Adventist resources was being absorbed by the Chicago Mission project.⁴ At the same time, she wrote that

the "treasury" was not to be dissipated on the "depraved," or the "lowest specimens of humanity."³

Why was it, then, that Mrs. White encouraged the city missions enterprise in the 1880's, was concerned with its decline around 1910, but at the turn of the century characterized inner-city involvement as a "false reformation" and cautioned against its excesses?

It is our thesis that her criticism of city missions around 1900 must not be understood as a blanket indictment against all inner-city work. Her criticism was localized. She was writing of a particular place, time, and person: the Chicago Medical Mission, around 1900, under the direction of Kellogg. This is clear as we survey her relationship to city missions against the historical backdrop provided us by Schwarz and Rice.⁴

Mrs. White had given her unqualified support to city missions nearly a decade before Kellogg's entrance into Chicago in 1893. In 1885 she wrote the long article on city missions that now appears in volume five of the *Testimonies*. It was directed to a conference president who was shirking his responsibility in urban areas. She wrote: "Shall the prince of darkness be left in undisputed possession of our great cities because it costs something to sustain missions?"⁵ After discussing financial matters, she added these words: "Let those who would follow Christ fully come up to the work, even if it be over the heads of ministers and president. . . . You have shown that you are conservative, and that your ideas are narrow. You have not done one-half what you might have done had you the true spirit of the work."⁶

At this time, in the mid-1880's, Adventist city missions were widespread. There were twenty-two city missions reported at the 1888 General Conference in Minneapolis.⁷ Urban missions activity had become a movement in Adventism. Several years later, in December 1894, Mrs. White began a series of articles in the *Review and Herald* (on "Our Duty to the Poor and Afflicted") to endorse the missions involvement.⁸ And it was to these articles, along with several others by Mrs. White, that Kellogg referred in February 1895 as a blueprint for his Chicago Medical Mission.⁹ Kellogg, then, was a relative latecomer among Adventists to be concerned with urban missions.

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Having reviewed Mrs. White's interest in city missions before the Chicago Medical Mission had matured, now we can discuss her relationship to the Chicago program. Her comments on Chicago can be grouped under

three headings: (1) comments in the early stage of the Chicago mission work, before 1895; (2) statements in the highly developed stage of the work, around 1900, including (a) those directed to Kellogg, which were usually negative at this time, and (b) those directed to David Paulson and others, which were positive; and (3) those on the Chicago enterprise after 1905.

Many of Mrs. White's statements on city missions in the period before 1895 are of a general nature in support of all city involvement, but as early as 1885 she wrote in the *Review and Herald* specifically of a Chicago mission. She commended persons who were active in this mission and encouraged them, though they were having financial difficulties. She wrote that they would not be short of funds if people would not spend so much money on "houses and lands" and would use it, instead, for such worthy causes as this mission.⁷

Ten years later, in 1895, after Kellogg had inaugurated his program in Chicago, she wrote approvingly of his endeavors in a personal letter. Responding to a previous letter from him, she declared: "I am in full sympathy with the work that is being done there [in Chicago]. I believe in helping along every line in which it is possible to help, following in the steps of Christ. Those who take hold of the Christian Help Work, who will consecrate themselves to God, will find that He will be a present help to them in every hour of need."⁸

Mrs. White's correspondence in the period around 1900 is misunderstood more easily than the earlier letters and articles are. She wrote prolifically; and to the reader without historical perspective for her counsel, she appears to have written ambiguously. We will consider first the negative and then the positive statements.

II

The negative criticism centers on the activities of Kellogg. He was essentially an egotist, sometimes condescending and even abrasive in his treatment of others. Unwilling to delegate responsibility, when he adopted a project he depended on his own great capacity to get work done. The problems with the Chicago mission are stamped with Kellogg's personal characteristics and intemperate industry.

"Mrs. White's primary reason for concern was that the work done at the mission was disproportionately large in comparison with other work."⁹ The laboratory for training field workers had become too large for the field. The work had become overcentralized. She never argued that the nature of the

Chicago work was bad, but only that it should be diffused over a broader area than simply Chicago. A cursory look at the *Medical Missionary*, a magazine edited by Kellogg, indicates that the medical missionary activity fostered by his Medical Missinnary and Benevolent Association was indeed conducted in more than Chicago. "There were dozens of mission stations all over the world. In fact, there were more Adventists working for the MMBA in 1901 than there were working for the General Conference."¹⁷ But a trip to Australia (1891-1900) had forced even greater cosmopolitan concerns on Mrs. White.

Not only are other *fields* than Chicago to be reached, write Mrs. White, but other *classes* than the poor.¹⁸ Not only are the poor to be helped, but the youth are to be educated and the wealthy are to be reached with the gospel.¹⁹ Besides overcentralizing in Chicago, Kellogg had overspecialized on the needs of the poor.

The dramatic problem in Chicago at that time was poverty. The Chicago World's Fair, together with the Great Panic in the 90's and the influx of the hordes of immigrants into the city, had left Chicago staggering. For those who worked there, the needs of the poor tended to eclipse the needs of other classes of people elsewhere. So Mrs. White wrote: "Of late, a great interest has been aroused for the poor and outcast classes; a great work has been entered upon for the uplifting of the fallen and degraded. This in itself is a good work. We should ever have the spirit of Christ, and we are to do the same class of work that He did for fallen humanity. . . . This will have its place in connection with the proclamation of the third angel's message."

But in the same paragraph, she tempered her comment with these words: "There is danger of loading down everyone with this class of work, because of the intensity with which it is carried on. . . . The gospel invitation is to be given to the rich and the poor, the high and the low, and we must devise means for carrying the truth into new places, and to all classes of people." "The relatively small Seventh-day Adventist organization at the turn of the century had to economize its efforts to present a balanced gospel.

Another criticism Mrs. White had regarding the Chicago Mission, not unrelated to the overcentralization problem, was the breach being created between the medical missionary work and the clerical ministry. Kellogg had a way of antagonizing the latter with condescending remarks about clergymen. Mrs. White reprimanded him for "exalting the medical missionary work above the work of the ministry."²⁰ She insisted on a better attitude toward the clergy from Kellogg, for ministers were neglecting sound programs — for example, "Christian Help Bands" and city missions — he-

cause they had associated these endeavors with the unpopular personality traits of the doctor. Also, because Kellogg controlled such a large working force in the MMBA, a division between himself and the clergy implied a schism of disastrous proportions. A schism was untenable. Mrs. White wrote about this matter: "The Lord has signified that the missionary, health restorative gospel should never be separated from the ministry of the word."¹ About this same time she said, "As the right arm is to the body, so is the medical missionary work to the third angel's message. But the right arm is not to become the whole body."²

The missions program was to be a ministry to the *whole man*. If the medical missionary work and the gospel ministry would stay together, there would be a ministry to the whole man. But in this crucial period around 1900 their relationship was strained. A purely preaching ministry was not a ministry to the whole man, nor was a purely medical ministry. True evangelism included both the gospel meetings and the restaurant and dispensary service. Never one without the other.

Yet another criticism of the Chicago enterprise was related to Mrs. White's holistic concept of man. She wrote of the "depraved" and the "lowest specimens of humanity" that use up church funds but provide no spiritual return. The church engages in philanthropy but not in evangelism. She called these poor who are fed by the church (but who never enter the full life of the church) "consumers, but not producers." She explained the meaning of this phrase in a letter to William Warren Prescott by saying that every believer is to be "a receiver and then a producer of good works."³ The "depraved" are those who do not engage in active personal evangelism after their conversion.

To spend time with a hopeless derelict was, in this sense, not ministering to the whole man, for the derelict who would never know the gospel, however often he visited the dispensary, was surely receiving only half a ministry. Of course, early Adventist standards for pronouncing a derelict "hopeless" may have been less rigorous than today's, for any issue of *The Life Boat* magazine, published by the Chicago Mission, reports conversions of drunkards and exconvicts and prostitutes who developed into responsible citizens and even, on occasion, medical students.

Finally, a criticism mentioned in Mrs. White's correspondence with Kellogg was the nondenominational nature of the Chicago Medical Mission. The mission was essentially evangelical but nonsectarian. Apparently it was affiliated closely enough with Seventh-day Adventists so that Jane Addams declined her support of it in 1889 because of its sectarian ties.⁴ But Mrs.

White wrote to Kellogg before the turn of the century that the minuscule Adventist budget could not absorb such a large nondenominational venture. She advised Kellogg at this point to gain financial support only from non-Adventists. It was at this time that Kellogg arranged for various financial projects independent of the Adventist Church, such as publication of *The Life Boat*, which at its peak had about 200,000 subscriptions. With the help of his various investments, Kellogg cut down the church-contributed support until only ten percent of his funds were from Adventist sources.

Later however, around 1900, Mrs. White raised further objection to the nondenominational nature of the mission. It was nearly independent financially, but much personnel and time were being expended on this one mission, and it was not distinctively Adventist. This criticism was expressed by church leaders as discussion became animated over Kellogg's standing in the church. The Life Boat Mission, a branch of the Chicago Medical Mission, was never called into question by Mrs. White at this time, for it always retained its Seventh-day Adventist label. An indication of the amount of Adventist personnel and time engaged in operating the mission is the fact that in 1910, when Battle Creek College was discontinued and could no longer send its students to the mission, the Chicago Medical Mission collapsed.

Thus, to summarize, Mrs. White's major objections to the Chicago Medical Mission were primarily of an administrative nature and only secondarily theological. Kellogg was generally criticized for bad administrative implementation of proper theological motives. The mission — largely in the person of Kellogg — was overcentralized in relation to missions work in the world field; it was overspecialized in its service for one class of people, it threatened imbalance with one kind of ministry — medical ministry (again, because of Kellogg's relationship to the clergy); and finally, it lacked sufficient church distinctiveness, for reasons of finance and personnel.

These are the negative criticisms of the Chicago enterprise. But there is a positive appraisal as well.

III

The Life Boat Mission, which operated in Chicago throughout this period around 1900, was never controversial among Seventh-day Adventists and received only commendation from Mrs. White. In 1905 she visited the Life Boat Mission and the Workingmen's Home, and lauded their city work in her "Notes on Travel."²⁵

The mission, under the direction of Paulson, an adjutant of Kellogg's,

7 included a dispensary, laundry facilities, a restaurant, and the Workingmen's Home, which served as a men's dormitory for the jobless. *The Life Boat* magazine, edited by Paulson, reflected the aims of the Life Boat Mission, which was surely no narrow definition of the gospel. The mission was apparently not interested in saving the "soul" only, but the soul, mind, and body — the whole man. The magazine reported treatments given in the dispensary as well as souls "saved" in the meetings. Issues discussed in *The Life Boat* also indicated a broad concept of the gospel; they included juvenile delinquency problems and intolerable child labor conditions.² Prison conditions and the problem of an exconvict's integration into society were often given editorial attention, and on several occasions, an entire issue of *The Life Boat* was devoted to "the prisons."³ Of these social problems Paulson wrote in 1902, that they "will not be settled in prayer meetings or in conventions, but . . . by individual effort on the part of men and women in whose hearts throbs a genuine love of humanity."⁴

It was this work that Mrs. White wrote should be multiplied in all urban centers. The Life Boat Mission was to be an archetype for the city missions movement. The work done at the Life Boat did not differ fundamentally from the work done in the rest of the Chicago Medical Mission; the Life Boat was just smaller. Had Kellogg's project remained the size of the Life Boat Mission in Chicago and had he expanded his missions work in other cities rather than enlarging to enormous proportions in Chicago itself, Mrs. White's objections might never have been raised. As it happened, however, the Life Boat Mission became Mrs. White's model for the medical missionary work, while its parent — the Chicago Medical Mission — was flawed.

We have reviewed Ellen White's relationship to Chicago in the early stage before 1895, and in the ambiguous period around 1900. It remains for us to mention her relationship to Chicago in the third period, after 1905.

By this time, inner-city activity in Chicago, as elsewhere, had tapered off. Mrs. White expressed her concern about this on a number of occasions, but one notable address was at the Life Boat Rescue Home in Hinsdale.⁵ The Rescue Home had been established in Chicago to receive unwed mothers and to provide a halfway house for prostitutes who had left their trade. In 1909 the home was moved to Hinsdale, a Chicago suburb, so that the young women who came to the home could enjoy the more amiable atmosphere outside the city. In addressing the personnel and patrons of the home in a dedication service for the newly built structure, Mrs. White commented, "Those who are conducting this home are doing an important work, and I believe that as a result of such efforts, many souls will be saved."⁶

Without further reference to Chicago, we will note Mrs. White's relationship to inner-city work, in general, after 1900. We have already found her in support of the city missions programs as early as the 1880's, long before the Chicago Medical Mission had been established. The only qualifying statements she made about city work were around 1900, and even then she commended the Life Boat Mission in the very heart of Chicago. Further confirmation for Mrs. White's interest in inner-city activity came in a number of later statements.

After 1900 she wrote that Adventists should locate outside the cities (as in an article "Our Duty to Leave Battle Creek"), but she also said that "from these outposts [Adventists are to] warn the cities, and *raise in them* memorials for God. There must be a force of influence in the cities, that the message of warning shall be heard." In the same article she wrote, "Our restaurants must be in the cities; for otherwise the workers in these restaurants could not reach the people and teach them the principles of right living."³¹ Later she stated that "the principles of health reform are to be promulgated as a part of the work in the cities. The voice of the third angel's message is to be heard with power."³²

In 1900, the same year that she was writing critically of some aspects of inner-city activity in Chicago, Mrs. White wrote of San Francisco: "In San Francisco a hygienic restaurant has been opened, also a food store, and treatment-rooms. These are doing a good work, but their influence should be greatly extended. Other restaurants similar to the one on Market Street should be opened in San Francisco and in Oakland. Concerning the effort that is now being made in these lines, we can say, Amen and amen."³³

Rather than advising a tempering of these efforts in San Francisco, Mrs. White recommended that more be done: "Cooking schools are to be established. . . . In the cities this work of instruction may be carried forward on a much larger scale than in smaller places. . . . He [the Lord] will work with those who carry out His plans, teaching the people how to bring about a reformation in their diet by the preparation of healthful, inexpensive foods. Thus the poor will be encouraged to adopt the principles of health reform; they will be helped to become industrious and self-reliant."³⁴

And in 1902, Mrs. White wrote of New York City as she had of San Francisco: "Under the direction of God, the mission in New York City has been started. This work should be continued in the power of the same Spirit that led to its establishment. . . . If in this great center medical missionary work could be established by men and women of experience, those who

would give a correct representation of true medical missionary principles, it would have great power in making a right impression on the people."⁹

Throughout the period after 1900, she continued to write of city missions, often mentioning specific centers where work should be done. Besides New York and San Francisco, missions were to thrive in San Diego, Los Angeles, Chicago, and other major cities.¹⁰ In 1909 she produced a series of articles entitled "The Work in the Cities."¹¹ In 1912, in a two-part article on "City Work" in the *Review and Herald*, she spoke of "the sympathy that Christ ever expressed for the physical needs of his hearers" and said that it won from many "a response to the truths he sought to teach."¹² As late as 1914 Mrs. White expressed her concern for the foreigners in the major population centers like New York and Chicago.¹³ Earlier she had said that the work done for the Swedish people in Chicago should be done for other groups elsewhere.¹⁴

V

Thus, it is apparent that Mrs. White gave unqualified support to city missions both in the 1880's and after 1900. Where the prophetic voice was heard, Seventh-day Adventist urban involvement maintained equilibrium. It was not trapped in the social gospel movement (bottom-heavy with humanitarianism) developing in this period; but neither was it like the conservative evangelicalism (top-heavy with evangelism) that developed after World War I. Seventh-day Adventism — at least in this period — appears to have struck the golden mean.

What criticism we do find in Mrs. White's writing on city missions is of a specialized nature. It forms an island in time and space around 1900, in Chicago. This criticism, therefore, cannot properly be applied in general terms to all inner-city involvement. The keynote of her objections around 1900 was the intemperate amount of inner-city activity in Chicago compared with other cities. The counsel was not to stop the work, but to diffuse it.

Of course, the Chicago problems of this period that Mrs. White addressed could hardly be more irrelevant to Seventh-day Adventists in urban centers today. Adventism is much larger today than it was in 1900, whereas the proportion of inner-city work in relation to the size of the church is appreciably less today than it was in 1900, or even in the 1880's. And to condone the modicum of Adventist urban involvement now because of Mrs. White's criticism of the work in Chicago in 1900 simply does violence to her intention.

The early growth of inner-city involvement in the 1880's was only en-

couraged by Mrs. White, and its decline in the first decades of the twentieth century was only resisted in her writing. A return, then, to early Adventist tradition on this issue, is not a return to the Adventism of the 1920's but to the Adventism of the 1890's. A retreat to the suburbs and tranquil conservatism is not in the spirit of *nineteenth century* Adventism at all.

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